

Long Range Priorities: Introduction to DEQ's Website

April 23, 2013

When the Department of Environmental Quality was formed in 1993, four major programs were consolidated by the General Assembly into the newly configured agency; i.e., State Water Control Board, Department of Air Pollution Control, Department of Waste Management and Council on the Environment.

Air, Water and Waste (now called Land Protection and Revitalization) operate as separate divisions within DEQ. Most of the functions previously incorporated in the Council on the Environment operate as programs within DEQ's Division of Environmental Enhancement, including the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program and Environmental Impact Review. Although long-range planning is considered and incorporated in all of DEQ's Divisions and programs, the broad-based planning of long-range goals – once spearheaded by the Council on the Environment – has not been called out as a specific function.

Long-range priorities

Stakeholder input is an important part of all of DEQ's programs; however, the views of the public are especially critical in formulation and prioritization of long-range goals. If DEQ is to evaluate and plan for the environmental needs that will be most important for Virginians in the next 50 years, the agency will need to understand how key segments of the citizenry perceive those needs. Cooperative efforts among industry, environmental advocates, local officials and agency staff can enhance DEQ's ultimate success in formulating and addressing the Commonwealth's long-range environmental priorities.

In anticipation of DEQ's 20th anniversary, DEQ Director David Paylor and DEQ staff met with four key stakeholders in 2012 – two representatives from industry, and two from conservation groups. Paylor posed the following question to these stakeholders concerning long-range priorities: "What issues, if not addressed effectively in the near future, will be of greatest concern to you and your constituencies in the next 30-50 years?" DEQ staff compiled the stakeholders' responses into five broad issues: water supply, water quality (with emphasis on nonpoint-source pollution), energy supply, societal growth and climate trends.

With this list of issues in hand, DEQ staff interviewed approximately 50 additional leaders across Virginia. Interviewees included representatives from local government, business, and conservation groups, as well as individuals. The original list of long-term priorities was expanded and refined with input from each person interviewed.

Environment Virginia Symposium discussions

The list of priority issues and sub-issues garnered from these stakeholder interviews became the starting point for further discussion at breakout sessions at the 2013 Environment Virginia Symposium.

The 24th annual Environment Virginia Symposium was held at Virginia Military Institute on April 9-11, 2013. The conference was attended by over 650 participants, including representatives from DEQ and other state agencies, local governments, businesses, environmental consultants, and conservation groups. This year's symposium featured a focus on the future, with a keynote speech by future forecaster Robert Johansen and a session track hosted by DEQ on "Envisioning Our Future."

Participants in this track were asked to describe the environmental and energy issues that will be of greatest concern in 30-50 years, with an emphasis on the broad topics identified in DEQ's previous stakeholder interviews: energy supply, water supply, water quality, climate trends and societal growth. Reporters noted attendees' comments at each of these breakout sessions. Input on these issues was also gathered via two electronic surveys that were presented to conference participants by Secretary of Natural Resources Doug Domenech. The breakout sessions and surveys were part of DEQ's efforts to address the long-term planning part of its mission.

Long-range priorities website

This website will continue the dialogue regarding Virginia's long-term environmental and energy priorities. On these pages, DEQ staff hopes to include the following information. Many of these documents are already posted.

- Summaries of DEQ staff interviews with stakeholders across Virginia
- Notes of the breakout sessions in the "Envisioning Our Future" track at Environment Virginia 2013
 - Energy supply
 - Water quality (nonpoint)
 - Water supply
 - Societal growth – Part I (emphasizing land redevelopment; waste; aging infrastructure)
 - Societal growth – Part II (emphasizing impacts on air and water; planning; land conservation)
 - Climate Trends
- Virginia's environmental futures survey (Survey Monkey)
 - Results from participants at Environment Virginia 2013 concerning the issues listed above, including Director David Paylor's presentation.
 - A form of this survey that members of the public may continue to participate in online.
- Envisioning our future survey: Next steps

- Results from participants at Environment Virginia 2013 concerning next steps in addressing the issues listed above, including Secretary Doug Domenech's presentation.
- A form of this survey that members of the public may continue to participate in online.
- Futures bulletin board
 - A continuing opportunity for members of the public to submit their ideas and comments on future environmental and energy priorities to DEQ staff for possible posting on this site.
 - An invitation to those who already have successful collaborative efforts under way to submit information about their "success stories" for the benefit of other Virginia communities. DEQ is especially interested in collaborative efforts being done on a regional basis and involving diverse stakeholders (such as local government, concerned citizens, businesses, conservationists, state government, military, federal government).
- Video of DEQ Director David Paylor's address at Environment Virginia 2013: "Celebrating Our Success," highlighting Virginia's environmental accomplishments and future goals.
- Calendar of events – selected meetings, conferences, and other activities where future environmental and energy issues will be discussed. The public may submit events to DEQ staff for possible inclusion in the calendar.